



New one-year course prepares Questa High School students for high-wage jobs in building trades

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LOS ALAMOS, N.M., Aug. 10, 2020—As part of a public-private partnership, a new class offered at Questa High will offer a first cohort of six students dual credit at the University of New Mexico—Taos and groom them for employment in an array of high-demand, skilled building trades with the Laboratory and other area employers as soon as next summer. The education project is a collaboration between the Laboratory, Questa Independent School District, New Mexico Building and Construction Trades Council, UA 412 Local Plumbers & Pipefitters, Questa Economic Development Fund and UNM—Taos.

“The Laboratory is pleased to collaborate with these education and economic-development leaders on career options for the emerging workforce,” said Los Alamos Director Thom Mason. “Skilled workers are vital to the Laboratory and to many other area employers. As the last 75 years have demonstrated, building and harnessing the regional workforce benefits both Northern New Mexico and the Laboratory over the long term.”

Mason added that the Laboratory expects to hire more than 1,200 craft, or specialized building trade, workers over the next five years.

“The union is very excited to move forward with this collaboration,” said Brian Condit, executive director, NMBCTC. “We’re glad to respond to the growing demand at the Lab and across Northern New Mexico for skilled builders.”

Beginning in the fall of 2020, one of the courses offered will allow Questa High School students to meet union standards. Paired with a high-school diploma, it allows students direct entry into union apprenticeship programs at age 18. As apprentices, they will work full time at the Laboratory or with other employers at the starting salary of \$18/hour while receiving additional classroom and on-the-job training. Upon completion of the apprenticeship, trainees will be journeymen with starting salaries ranging from \$70,000 to \$75,000 per year plus benefits. Participation in the course is free to students.

“Empowering our students to embark on well-paid career paths with New Mexico employers is a top priority for Questa Independent School District,” said Carla Archuleta, Questa superintendent. “This first cohort is only the beginning for Questa High School graduates who will be rebuilding the economy of the future.”

The new program will also revitalize the Questa High School’s welding program.

“Transforming the economy in Questa begins with a skilled workforce,” said Malaquias Rael, chair of the Questa Economic Development Fund Board. “It has been a joy to have collaborated with so many conscientious partners to re-tool our community’s job-training offerings.”

“This new program is part of the UNM-Taos mission to provide meaningful early college initiatives, dual-credit, and career pathways to northern New Mexicans,” said Patrick Valdez, Chancellor of UNM–Taos.

The Questa program is only the latest job-training collaboration between the Laboratory and area educational partners. A similar building-trades program was recently announced at Taos High School. Likewise, Santa Fe Community College has pioneered a new program for machinists, and Northern New Mexico College is successfully training Radiation Control Technicians. Programs like these require one to two years of specialized training and result in high-demand, high-wage jobs.

“I commend these regional partners as well as the students of Questa High School for remaining adaptable and optimistic despite unprecedented challenges,” said Art Sparks, UA 412 Business representative. “We are eager to bring new talent into the fold.”

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